Creating a Culture-First

Onboarding Experience in a Post-Pandemic World

By Keith Kitani, CEO of GuideSpark

GuideSpark

Onboarding is a crucial program for any organization on a number of levels; retention, culture, and productivity being at the top of the list.

It's a huge opportunity to bring on new team members with the right mindset from the very beginning, and provide them with the resources, team support, and company values they'll carry with them in their career at your company, not to mention boost longevity and retention of your workforce.

In fact, 69% of employees are more likely to stay with a company for three years if they experienced great onboarding.

But it's not such an easy feat, even outside the context of a pandemic, and very few organizations are able to create a great, engaging onboarding experience. According to a 2017 survey by Gallup, 12% of employees think their companies did a great job of onboarding, and it's clear that this task has only become more difficult in 2020. Prioritizing a great onboarding experience has a number of positive effects on your organization; when done right, you can not only bring your new employees up to speed on everything they need to get to work – like paperwork, equipment, and technology – but you can also drive a connection to the company, colleagues, and culture right from the beginning.

As we continue through this strange period in our history, which has effectively forced many organizations to become remote overnight, consider approaching this as a potentially perfect time to *completely rethink* the process of onboarding. We're now more distributed – and more digital – than ever before, so how do we design an onboarding experience than can not only work in this remote setting, but can also truly drive the culture, camaraderie, and commitment you need? This will take more than simply moving traditional onboarding initiatives online –

and it means you'll need to reimagine the way you communicate with new hires from their very first day, through their critical first months at the company.

Here's my approach to making that onboarding experience a successful one.

Reimagine the Experience

Building an engaging, comprehensive onboarding program is a tall order on its own,

and is made even more difficult in our newly remote, dispersed work environment. But, rethinking onboarding in this context isn't as simple as moving a traditional orientation meeting into a Zoom call. Instead, consider all of the elements you'll need to truly connect with the new employee and drive the engagement you're looking for. While Zoom calls and virtual meetings are efficient, you'll want to take into account factors like the rapid growth of Zoom fatigue, affecting remote employees everywhere. Find a variety of ways to connect beyond just online meetings, while still aiming to promote your company culture and get across valuable information. An hours-long orientation over a video call may seem efficient from a time perspective, but it's likely that you'll see engagement drop off quickly, as it's difficult for new employees to digest such a high volume of information at one time. A combination of interactive sessions and resources such as on-demand videos and infographics will, depending on what's being presented, help to break up the information into more digestible pieces.

Onboarding is Not a One-Time Event

While one of the most crucial elements of an onboarding program is a positive first-day experience, companies are now focusing on multi-month experiences to drive ongoing engagement.

The first 3 months, in particular, are vital for the employee experience, given that 22% of new hires leave the company within this window.

A strong, integrated communication experience, with a large breadth of messaging outlets and mediums, will enable you to tie it all together.

Consider an onboarding campaign with a mixture of ongoing communications, forms and resources, 1-on-1s with the hiring manager, virtual meetings with their new team or with the company as a whole, and more, that carries the new hire through their first 90 days and beyond.

And, as you design the delivery channels and methods for your program, think about how to then make it feel customized and personalized to your new employee. Broadly speaking, you'll want your onboarding program to be consistent for each new hire, but personalizing certain aspects based on location, type of role, or department, can drive more engagement and a better overall experience. Managing this complexity to generate more attention and excitement is easier now than ever before, with the advent of tools designed to help organizations scale their communications experiences.

Focus on Culture and Connection

In a more digital and distributed world, there are some great business efficiencies to be had – but also quite a few new challenges.

With fewer physical offices filled with people to greet a new employee on their first day, it's difficult for companies to immerse these new hires into the processes, norms, behaviors, and values of the organization – which is an important element for assimilating employees into your office culture. Effectively conveying company culture is something that could make or break your new hire's initial experiences working at the company, so consider new, innovative ways to share the values and stories that keep your workforce tied together. Identify new ways to connect as a team – through shared interests, new Slack channels, or a virtual happy hour. Most importantly, your ongoing outreach and consistent messaging will be key.

Measure & Iterate As You Go

An ongoing approach to onboarding that launches with each new hire provides the valuable opportunity to measure and iterate your messaging every time.

Use communication engagement data to measure which messaging is most effective, and identify specific gaps in engagement – then, implement a new iteration for the next launch.

Automation and scaling allow you to deliver a better onboarding process over time, honing your process with every new employee.

Leveraging data and communication tools or online platforms can enable your organization to not only deliver a consistent new hire experience with every launch, but also quickly customize when needed for different regions or departments, or make changes to messaging on the fly.

Summary

While the need to hire new employees during this crisis is an encouraging sign on its own, a lack of strong onboarding communications can quickly backfire for organizations.

An investment in hands-on, ongoing, iterative communications will make all the difference in this virtual landscape, and even well beyond the crisis. Strategically align new employees with your company's culture, priorities, and values, and start them off on the right foot for a long, productive, and motivated career with your organization. Technology can help along the way, from automating the experience to collecting and analyzing data; online tools and platforms can make it even easier to deliver a great onboarding experience that you can measure. Outside of the limitations of an in-person welcoming experience, it will become more critical than ever to have a strong plan in place to rethink onboarding with culture and connection at the center.

About Keith Kitani

Keith Kitani is CEO and co-founder of GuideSpark, a change communications software company. He brings over 20 years of digital communication, e-learning, and technology expertise to lead GuideSpark as it enables organizations to manage, measure, and scale their internal communications effectiveness to drive organizational change and achieve business goals. Keith's career has been focused on building companies that develop digital solutions to connect people and information.

About GuideSpark

GuideSpark, Inc. is the leading provider of change communications solutions designed to drive strategic and organizational change. GuideSpark Communicate Cloud® is the first HR communications software platform designed to manage, measure, and scale your communication effectiveness. GuideSpark combines technology and internal communication expertise to deliver unique solutions that have helped over 1000 enterprises transform their HR program engagement and drive strategic change.

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